

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 218 167

SO 014 036

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TITLE The Educated Perspective.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 24p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Education; Cognitive Development;
*Cognitive Processes; *Educational Needs;
*Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy;
Educational Quality; *General Education; *Higher
Education; Humanities Instruction; Job Skills;
Technical Education; Technology

ABSTRACT

It is the responsibility of higher education to help individuals develop skills and powers of reasoning so that culture can be understood and preserved. There are two aspects of reason, the reason of Plato that seeks a complete understanding and the reason of Ulysses that seeks an immediate method of action. Because of the demand for technocrats, the reason of Ulysses has coerced the reason of Plato into higher education. In some graduate schools, for example, language requirements are dropped for computer programming or statistical courses. In some university courses, students spend more time with the computer than talking with their professor. Thus, the human element tends to be excluded because technology is out of hand. So powerful is technology that it forces us to react without time to think or plan. The answer to this problem is for higher education to extend genuine scholarship that projects freedom, integrity, honesty, and moral courage. The enlightened approach of understanding, dominant during the Age of Reason, must be sought and taught. Educators, including scientists, and students need to absorb the reason of Plato to promote the art of life. (Author/NE)

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The Educated Perspective

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1982

Sp 014 036

The Educated Perspective

Abstract

This paper attempts to identify flaws within the educated perspective of many bright university graduates. Some of these identified flaws are thought to be the result of technical influences on the campus that force professors and students to rush through many significant questions and concerns that relate to purpose and thoughtful inquiry. Emphasis is given to the need for a scholarship that projects freedom, integrity, honesty, and moral courage. Examples are provided from many sources to stimulate interest and concern for this hidden problem within higher education.

The Educated Perspective

It has been said that the only truths are those defined by some cultural apparatus.¹ Symbols and related meaning experienced in everyday activity help to form our perceptions and organize our knowledge. This is part of culture, and it is formulated in many different ways through schools, colleges, universities, and ongoing institutional activity (e.g., economic, political, social, religious, and technological influences).

It is the responsibility of higher education to help individuals develop skills and powers of reasoning so that culture can be understood and preserved. The development of skills is usually a matter of training, and the power of reasoning or intellectual development is mostly a self-development function. Institutions of higher learning attempt to help with the development of reasoning powers through intense study and thoughtful analysis of complicated matters, usually within a particular discipline.

Most educational institutions and their teachers believe they are the cultural apparatus charged with defining truth. It may be that higher education does help to define and transmit certain truths, but powerful political, social, religious, economic, and technological forces also work to

define and mold truth. Educators strive in a pawky manner to produce students who will go out and define political, social, and religious values based on reason and diligent inquiry, i.e., the educated perspective. It is through the classroom in various subtle ways that educators can have a most significant influence on society. "University teachers are today the chief transmitters and interpreters of the heritage which defines the duties of men and sets up the standards that society must respect."²

Alfred North Whitehead once said that there is no royal road to learning through an airy path of brilliant generalizations. "The problem of education is to make the pupil see the woods by means of the trees."³ It is understood that an education often requires hard work, and the result should be a person who approaches life in a thoughtful but vigorous manner. Mastering skills may indeed be useful, but application and purpose are also most important. "We have got to remember the two aspects of Reason, the Reason of Plato and the Reason of Ulysses. Reason as seeking a complete understanding and Reason as seeking an immediate method of action."⁴ This is a most significant starting place for an understanding of the educated perspective in modern times.

Educated persons, those who have completed four or more years of study within higher education, should have instincts which seek a complete understanding, the Reason of Plato. Yet, it seems that educational institutions, in their

desire to grow and to supply the demand for technocrats in society, have been coerced to promote a Reason based on immediate method of action. This new trend was most obvious in the era of World War II,* and it has continued with increasing emphasis as technology, consumerism, and global military doctrines created a primary need for immediate method of action, the Reason of Ulysses. A sanguine mood was created, and it has influenced us in the direction of sophisticated technical solutions for problems relating to the human condition.

The Reason of Ulysses with speed and urgency is incredibly powerful, and it also tends to be incredibly naive and shortsighted. The Reason of Plato, seeking complete understanding, is reflective and penetrating, but it is also slow and methodical, a painstaking thoughtful process. More frequently than not, the educated perspective being molded today uses the Reason of Ulysses. It is most impressive when put into action, but it is deceptive and potentially dangerous. As Jose' Ortega y Gasset said forty years ago, "To be an engineer and nothing but an engineer means to be potentially

* Godfrey Hodgson explains that, "In 1947, with postwar recovery under way everywhere, the United States produced about one-half of the world's manufactures: 57 percent of its steel, 43 percent of its electricity, 62 percent of its oil" (p. 19, America in Our Time, New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

everything and actually nothing. ...That is why our time, being the most intensely technical, is also the emptiest in all human history."⁵

Our present system of education for the higher learning has produced few enlightened leaders willing to strive and work for the Reason of Plato. What we have in place of enlightenment is an elevated darkness wherein technical gratification is creating serious problems while attempting to solve problems. As the lethal nuclear weapons problem demonstrates, our elevated technical darkness may result in total darkness for civilization at a time when there will be more people with a formal education than ever before. Robert Hutchins said that modern educators function like Henry Ford, a sort of mobilized technology assisting technology.⁶ Bruno Bettelheim explains youthful unrest as being related to failures of technology: "Since youth do not trust the human intellect to find ways out of this impasse to which modern technology has brought us, they become anti-intellectual."⁷ This promotes a cycle of distrust and emptiness from one generation to another resulting in cold-blooded, fast paced technologists.

Educating bright students for their place in the world is usually being done with consideration of what the world is like now, not what we think it ought to be. If we live in a technically oriented environment, we tend to educate people to handle technical problems. This means we train them to function and not to think. In graduate school, language requirements

are dropped for computer programming or statistical courses. Any graduate student unfamiliar with computers will probably not be able to conduct research. The computer is not just an electro-mechanical tool like a pencil sharpener. It is so complex that one must enlist a specialist in order to conduct sophisticated operations. Like the pencil sharpener, the computer must have a human being to activate it and keep it functional. But the computer, unlike the pencil sharpener, keeps the user awe-struck with expectations of magical powers. The combination of computer technology and statistical methods produces refined but distorted projections of human activity. This will always be the case, because machines and formulas cannot adequately represent the human spirit. A point not properly understood by many educated technicians with more technical power than they need to accomplish their work.

In some university courses, students spend more time working with the computer than they do talking to their professor. The computer is only a machine. "If we try to flee from our human condition into the computer, we only meet ourselves there. The inevitable game of 'choice and consequences' is still to be played out, though on a different level."⁸ Process has overtaken purpose as a major concern on most campuses, particularly within the physical sciences. This is not a new theme nor does it go completely unnoticed by university professors.

Since the development of the Age of Reason in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rationalists sought to find laws of nature and to establish a universal moral order. "The trend of modern thought is away from rationalization of the facts to a more careful and disinterested examination of the facts themselves."⁹ This trend has produced a new age of excited dependence on science and its offspring, technology.

The Age of Reason in making the transition between the Middle Ages and the modern era was responsible for the beginnings of mass education. Organized efforts to inform were thought to contribute to and enhance the enlightened spirit. Rationalism, cosmology, scientific method, secularism, conquest of superstition, confidence, tolerance, freedom, legal reform, as well as mass education have been traced to the human spirit that we call the Age of Reason.

Education in the Age of Reason meant thinking for yourself, being independent. Immanuel Kant expressed the mission of the Age of Reason in a famous reply to the question: What is enlightenment? Kant said, "Enlightenment is the liberation of man from his self-caused state of minority. Minority is the incapacity of using one's understanding without the direction of another."¹¹

Now one may ask the question: Have our modern institutions of higher learning consistently maintained the educational traditions initiated in the Age of Reason? Universities seem to hold on to the enlightened rhetoric from the Age of Reason, but

practice methods related to technical efficiency. They train technocrats under the banner of enlightenment. In the late 1950s C. Wright Mills warned that universal education may lead to technical idiocy and natural provincility rather than to informed and independent intelligence. "A high level of bureaucratic rationality and of technology does not mean a high level of either individual or social intelligence."¹²

Ortega y Gasset noted that as the contemporary university has added the function of research, it has abandoned almost entirely the teaching or transmission of culture.¹³ If this is so, then culture from the past, along with truths from the past, are no longer understood and practiced. Independence, freedom, confidence, and tolerance, the concepts taught and transmitted starting with the Age of Reason, may not be properly defined or understood by our modern educational institution as significant truths.

The educated perspective is now almost totally a Reason seeking immediate method of action. A technique for earning a living (i.e., how to do something) seems to be a more important truth than understanding for a culture that demands measurable results. Measuring success with technology brings us bolt upright with anxiety for immediate gratification, and it makes us self-conscious about our status in life. What happens is that technology measures technology, and the human element tends to be excluded. Purpose, which requires long term commitment, is put aside in place of immediate, measurable results. A quest

for long term goals that are related to concepts such as freedom, tolerance, and independence are not measurable, because they are continuously being developed. The quest is never completed; it is a dynamic struggle like developing truth.

In our desire to measure and quantify with relatively little attention to purpose and quality, we have created a culture of competent, sybaritic fools with considerable technical knowledge. Simple-minded educators who are willing to research and report on anything in order to get a publication or a grant are the bane of our cultural transmission process. They circulate vacuous, junk ideas and incoherent dribblings in the name of scholarship and force graduate students to emulate them. When Thomas Wolf of Look Homeward Angel fame was at Harvard studying to be a playwright, he associated with Ph.D. candidates and characterized them as intellectual peasantry -- dull, cold, and suspicious of any idea they had not been told to approve.¹⁴ This same mentality is found in the bureaucracy of government, the military, and in business. These neutered intellects with a college degree think within the caverns of their barren paradigm of reality. There are no intellectual echos being emitted, because there are no shouts for Reason. This condition causes atrophy of the spirit. Andrew Hacker said, in a dreary tone, that "...Americans will learn to live with danger and discomfort, for this condition is the inevitable accompaniment of democracy in its declining

years."¹⁵ We may be going downhill without an understanding of the problem.

The Reason of Ulysses seems to have conquered the Reason of Plato, but why is this happening? It may be happening, as many suspect, because our technology is now out of hand. Technology, not dominant during the Age of Reason, requires the Reason of Ulysses to function. Without this Reason of immediate method of action, our technology would destroy us. This may be slowly happening now, because we have lost control in many important areas. The technical process is pervasive and powerful in our culture and now forces us to react without time to think and plan. We react automatically. The illusion of technique, as William Barrett lucidly explains, is a process wherein humans are losing control of technical method in subtle ways without knowing it. Barrett through his book, The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization, makes an argument for the Reason of Plato. "So long as we can negotiate the triumph of technology successfully, we are unconcerned to ask what the presuppositions of this technical world are and how they bind us to its framework. ...That is the point at which we shall have turned all our questions over to the think tanks as problems of human engineering."¹⁶

About twenty years ago Christian Bay wrote a most interesting paper entitled, "A Social Theory of Intellectual Development" for Nevitt Sanford's The American College. Bay said that all problems have this much in common: they stimulate

efforts toward rationality.¹⁷ This may indeed be true, but the effort toward rationality is not always successful. Our rational ways with technology frequently result in chaos. The Reason of Ulysses, now dominant in maintaining our technical momentum, may not be able to reverse technical problems set in motion decades ago.

Some people suspect that conservative political trends are attempts to invoke rational behavior, but a slower, more cautious approach, wherein political power is consolidated at the top, does not necessarily solve technical problems or address human concerns. It frequently serves up simplistic notions in the form of so-called "basics" as answers to involved and highly complex technical problems that require a mixture of human wisdom, patience, and uncommon respect for technical danger.

Educators have a purpose, as Christian Bay explains, to help develop rational, independent, intellectual individuals.¹⁸ Assuming this is accomplished, what happens to educated individuals? Are they vulnerable to greed, power, and sophisticated nonsense as was enunciated by a grand technical systems theory to win the Vietnam War? Do they become ideological dupes for powerful and tyrannical notions as represented by McCarthyism? Do they follow commands without questioning purpose and help to perpetuate Watergate type scandals? Yes, yes, yes! This happens to people educated in the ways of rational, independent, and intellectual thinking.

Eric Hoffer, a working man, scorns the ways of an intellectual and believes a major problem for this country will be to channel the energies of the intellectual to worthwhile causes.¹⁹ Robert Nisbet, a scholar, is also concerned and perplexed with power crazed intellectuals desiring to be close to the seat of power.²⁰ Hoffer, with his straightforward style, has said, "It is natural to assume that the well-educated are more humane and compassionate than the uneducated. But, believe it or not, the reverse seems to be true. When Gandhi was asked what it was that worried him most, he replied, 'The hardness of heart of the educated.'"²¹

Educated persons have some difficulty in not restraining their knowledge. They frequently impose their theories on others, yet working people have little desire to run the world with their intellect. The Eric Hoffers of the world, diminishing in number, accept no nonsense from doubletalking intellectual simpletons. But Hoffer and others like him do appreciate a hard working, spirited businessman or politician, if their education has not converted them into strident word tyrants without a cause. Hoffer once referred to Richard Nixon, after the Watergate scandle, as being a 'courageous political leader; this generous appraisal may have been Hoffer's way of paying tribute to a spirited but obsessive politician with humble credentials caught up in misdeeds. Nixon's tragic fall from power vividly illustrates the flawed human condition and at the same time is a mirror of ourselves and our society, the good and the bad

driven to excesses. All of us suffered when Watergate revelations were exposed, but educators should take a special responsibility for the misguided efforts of educated people running our government. It is too easy to vent a grim moral indignation and then return to the academic high ground. About 1905 when Leo Tolstoy was seventy-seven years old, he predicted that if the Russian revolutionaries began to ape the West, they would be degraded by politics as soon as they come to power. Tolstoy feared they would reflect: "Smugness, pride, vanity and, above all, contempt of their fellow man."²²

The central problem here is our uneducated, educated population who have never been properly taught to respect and practice the Reason of Plato. It may be foolish to think the university can make a difference when pernicious human factors dominate our technical culture, but if the university cannot make a difference in our society, what will? Can the freedom and dignity of scholarship work to enlighten us rather than just keep us informed and dependent on technology? While attempting to explain the mission of the university, Jose' Ortega y Gasset said, "The university is the intellect, it is science erected into an institution."²³ Furthermore, he predicted an uplifting within the history of the western world will occur when the university returns to its grand hour of enlightenment.

At this time, the university is over staffed with monastic intellectual phonies passing themselves off as teachers, researchers, and scientists of the first order.

Genuine scholarship projecting freedom, integrity, honesty, and moral courage is being smothered with unrefined, intellectual pulp in the form of parasitic technical survival skills. In other words, there is little reward or demand for intellectual honesty. Serious scholars often evoke feelings of gentle sadness as they attempt to maintain their self-respect and integrity. Numbers of articles published, meaningless committee work, half-baked professional meetings, and consulting for the public dollar take up the time of many professors. Teaching, studying, writing, thinking or concentrating on one good top quality project at a time are seldom practiced or given serious attention. The ascetic influence on the campus has been replaced by the desire to have immediate professional gratification and status. This is a reflection of society's technical soft-headedness and lack of good sense. A fatuous approach to education produces students and professors to fit the fatuous mold.

Students learn to hustle like their harried professors. Within the university a delicate hustle is being transmitted to each new class.²⁴ There is a little time for the Reason of Plato, therefore, topics like speed reading are taught to bright students so that they may keep up with the pack like jackals devouring words. Speed, a concept not practiced in the Age of Reason, is the modern implicit learning approach for students in higher education. We may be producing jaunty

cheerleaders for technical mediocrity that cannot practice either the Reason of Plato or the Reason of Ulysses. The Reason of Conformity and quick technical agility are being taught as human survival skills. Many times this does not result in either action or understanding. The results are quick reactions like a reflex in response to technical problems along with an omnipotent image and a superficial knowledge of human events in the world. This is all fostered by bickering, supercilious professors who vent their anxiety and frustrations without much experience of the world outside academe. The mediocre flashes of activity within the university are being matched by equally mediocre but flamboyant and utterly naive judgments from public commentators like George Will and R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., an educated pair of uneducated word jugglers.

Will and Tyrrell, Jr. offer their manipulated, half-baked notions of the world along with a smart array of carefully selected facts and opinions to keep the quasi literate, college educated amused and befuddled. They also intellectualize the public with overly cute notions without any firsthand knowledge of their subjects; they have never served in the military, worked at manual labor or suffered under a repressive bureaucratic system. They have gone to graduate schools, taught (in the case of Will), given advice to people, and written their opinions for the highest bidder. They seem to lack either

the Reason of Plato or the Reason of Ulysses. They have the Reason of articulate, but persuasive, nonsense formulated by cookbook intellectual insights. Exactly the kind of insights that produced the Vietnam tragedy. Their misplaced intellectual exactness and pedantic exuberance could be more appropriately displayed within the confines of a debating society that forces participants to diligently and seriously research one topic at a time with equal time allowed for opposing views.

Jean Jacques Rousseau said that, "Youth is the time to study wisdom, age the time to practice it."²⁵ Many smart intellectuals today do neither. They are too enthralled with their barrage of words and too busy telling others what should be done. They represent frustrated opinion molders who shirk from taking any responsibility for dynamic human programs in government, education or in the private business sector. They are content to kibitz with refined nonsense from the safety of smug intellectual retreats. What we need is a Reason based on informed thoughtful reflection.

Eric Hoffer is quite concerned that intellectuals pose a threat to this country through their desire to control and manipulate events.²⁶ Hoffer is explicit in his critical analysis: "A triumphant technology ushers in a psychological age, and history is made not by the hidden hand of circumstances but by men. For the mass of people the denouement of

technological progress is a passage from servitude to things to the more demeaning servitude to men."²⁷ This theme of Hoffer's is a twentieth century dilemma that is understood by many thoughtful people, but it has not been generally acknowledged within the structures of educational leadership. Richard S. Peters explains that "...a liberal education is based ultimately on respect for truth which depends on reasons and not on the word or will of any man, body or book."²⁸ Educators frequently get themselves caught up in narrow, bureaucratic procedural nonsense that is crippling to the concepts developed two hundred years ago in the Age of Reason.

Many educators are entrepreneurs first and teachers second. As an example, today some of our brightest scientists in the new field of biotechnology (genetic manipulations with deoxyribonucleic acid - DNA) are also major stockholders in companies that utilize their research. Indeed, these scientists are serious scholars, but they are also serious business people. Like the well-meaning pioneers of nuclear energy in the 1930s and 40s, they are quite enthusiastic about the possible benefits to humankind and less sensitive to the dangers to humankind. Their work is vulnerable to industrial abuses from around the world, but it also holds a faint promise for altering, in a positive way, the biological life structure on this planet.

The Reason of Plato, in the case of sophisticated technological advances, requires slow development and thoughtful

control. Understanding a major technical breakthrough is not a simple process. We now have so much technology, there is a serious problem of overloading our capacity to understand and control it. When this happens, practitioners panic and use the Reason of Ulysses just to keep us alive. Examples from the technologies of nuclear energy and chemical products demonstrate how well-intentioned people have created serious pollution problems that may never be solved. Martin Heidegger said that human activity can never directly counter technological danger. "But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it."²⁹

Advances such as biotechnology come from the tacit knowledge scientists have and apply to solve problems. Hunches and intuitions are part of the creative scientific process and part of scientific tacit knowledge. However, as Michael Polanyi said, "Men need a purpose which bears on eternity."³⁰ A truth which is in harmony with the vicissitudes of human nature is more likely to be produced from the Reason of Plato. Scientists who research without some connection to the harmony of nature (i.e., an understanding of nature's vicious ways) and sense of purpose are in danger of being neutralized or overwhelmed by their own efforts. This has happened to many nuclear weapons scientists who now speak out against their devices in vain.

Students who graduate from higher education without an understanding of the Reason of Plato are unfinished products. They are simple, unsophisticated mechanics anxious to work on any problem for a price. Many students do not understand either the Reason of Plato or the Reason of Ulysses; they are credentialed technocrats willing to create a problem in order to have something to do. We need the function of Reason to promote the art of life.³¹

Institutions of higher education have the special obligation to instill the vigor of knowledge acquisition along with, as Michael Polanyi said, an unwavering purpose which bears on eternity. The Reason of Plato can best be understood and acquired from those who attempt to use this process (knowledge and purpose). There are no guarantees for students, but the enlightened approach, developed from the Age of Reason, may make a difference in our technically flawed and morally confused society.

Many problems are inherent in our human condition, and press themselves upon us unless we individually shelter ourselves from them or can imagine that we are sheltered. Technology helps us to imagine we are sheltered from many swirling problems, when in fact we are blinded by technology's glittering reflections from hidden cesspools.

A sense of purpose, dedication, and hard work from our educated technical and nontechnical groups may uplift the

spirits of us all. The world community will prosper when the educated perspective is enriched with the Goddess Reason.

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